C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DOHA 001734

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/PD, NEA/ARP
INFO NSC FOR ABRAMS, DOD/OSD FOR SCHENKER AND MATHENY
LONDON FOR ARAB MEDIA OFFICE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/13/2010
TAGS: PREL KPAO QA ALJAZEERA
SUBJECT: EMBASSY DEMARCHES ON OBJECTIONABLE AL JAZEERA
WEBSITE MATERIAL

REF: A. WHITTLESEY-DOHA EMAIL 10/13

Classified By: Ambassador Chase Untermeyer, Reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador and PAO met separately 10/13 with
GOQ and Al Jazeera officials to express USG objections to
material published recently on Al Jazeera's website
(www.aljazeera.net) relating to the recent visit of U/S Karen
Hughes to the region. Al Jazeera's website director
acknowledged that some of the material was unacceptable as
published and had been changed on his instructions. All the
material has now been removed from the website. End summary.

¶2. (C) The material in question was a piece entitled
"Improving America's Image: Where to?" It consisted of an
introduction and four sections (including photos) entitled
"Manifestations," "Causes," "American Tools," and "Karen
Hughes." The stated purpose of this piece was to "review the
reasons and manifestations of enmity to Washington that is
spreading among Arab and Islamic peoples."

¶3. (C) Ambassador raised the objectionable website content
during a 10/13 meeting with Abdulla Al-Jaber, Acting Director
of the European and Americas Department of the Ministry of
Foreign Affairs. The Ambassador stressed that this was the
sort of irresponsible reporting that produced problems and
tensions in relations between Qatar and the United States.
The Ambassador also made reference to the most recent DIA
analysis of Al-Jazeera broadcasts, noting that the incidence
of objectionable content had increased after several months
of relative improvement.

¶4. (C) PAO met separately 10/13 with Abdulaziz Al Mahmoud,
chief editor of Al Jazeera website. Drawing on Ref A points
PAO objected to the slide show's depiction of the 9/11
attacks as a "manifestation" of "enmity" in the Arab world
toward US policies, emphasizing that those attacks were
cowardly acts carried out by a handful of terrorists with no
regard for human life. PAO also rejected the slide show's
assertion that USG sanctions had caused "the starvation of
thousands of Arabs and Muslims," noting that the US is the
largest donor of emergency food supplies in the world. PAO
also took issue with and contradicted the slide show's
assertion of "US. control of the Arabs' wealth and oil" and
noted that the section entitled "Tools" (referring to the
public diplomacy tools that the US has used in the Arab
world) gave a narrow, distorted view of such US actions,
including omission of any mention of the US role in
liberating Muslims in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kuwait, Afghanistan or
Iraq, or the large scale of USG assistance in Darfur and
South Asia, and the fact that the US is the largest donor to
the Palestinian people. PAO noted that the slide show
appeared to have been removed from the website and requested
confirmation of the fact. PAO also encouraged Al Mahmoud to
draw on the many information resources available to him and
his staff via the Public Affairs Section, and left him a
folder with fact sheets and links relating to USG assistance
in the region, including USG emergency aid and details of USG
exchange programs.

¶5. (C) Al Mahmoud had clearly been expecting PAO to raise the
website material and was ready with his response. He said the
slide show had not been removed, but had migrated (as is
normal with front page material) into the archives (Note: It
has now apparently been completely removed. End note). He
concurred with the points PAO raised and noted that the
website material had been brought to his attention by the
managing editor. He had reviewed the slide show and requested
changes be made. Most notably, he said, he had ordered that
the picture of the starving African child be removed and that
the mention of "US. control of Arab wealth and oil" be
amended. "A mistake was made, and it has been fixed," he
said. He urged PAO to look again at the slide show to verify
if the changes made the slide show less objectionable.

¶6. (C) PAO subsequently attempted to retrieve the archived
slide show from the website without success and, a couple of
hours after the meeting, Al Mahmoud called to say that the
slide show had in fact been completely removed from the
website on orders from Al Jazeera's managing director, Wadah
Khanfar. (Note: Post surmises that Wadah had in turn been

influenced by the Ambassador's MFA meeting earlier in the day. End Note).

The Website Director

¶7. (C) Abdelaziz Al Mahmoud is U.S.-educated, having graduated with a degree in Mechanical Engineering from New York State's Clarkson University. He also served in the Royal Air Force and participated in numerous training sessions both in the US and the UK. He gave several humorous descriptions of life at Al Jazeera, including a lively imitation of the weekly editorial committee meeting (headed by Wadah Khanfar) he attends and the role of "wasda" (influence/nepotism) in Al Jazeera/Qatari/Gulf affairs.

¶8. (C) Al Mahmoud said that until April he had been responsible for both the English and the Arabic websites, but that now the English website was the responsibility of Al Jazeera International. "There is no relationship whatsoever between the English and the Arabic website," he said. He expressed his disapproval of this state of affairs, saying that with the new AJI TV channel, Al Jazeera had become a four-headed entity, and the result was "chaos" he said, disapprovingly. He told PAO that the AJ website follows the AJ TV channel in terms of its lead story and in terms of the general issues of focus. The website has a slower pace than the TV station, however, and is more oriented to in-depth analysis. He said his staff is currently working on a "huge" analysis of the Iraqi constitution and related issues. The website is continuously updated, and publishes a 100 news items a day, which makes it one of the largest news websites in the world, said Al Mahmoud.

¶9. (C) Comment: Al Mahmoud is clearly very wary of attracting negative attention from his chain of command, and is aware that an irritated USG means trouble for him. He urged PAO to call him directly any time the Embassy observes troubling material on the website. End comment.
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